

Throughout the gospels we hear how Jesus challenged the status quo and societal or religious expectations and understandings. He often confronted the religious authorities as he emphasized a personal relationship with God, rather than one found solely through strict adherence to religious rituals and rules. He boldly called out the social hierarchies that excluded those on the margins. And by choice, it was these folks to whom Jesus gave his time, and attention.

In today's gospel, we listen in as Jesus gives thanks to God for those to whom God has revealed him. Those who like infants or children, have not learn-ed wisdom, but wisdom that arises from the heart. It was assumed that the educated and self-proclaimed religious leaders had sufficient wisdom to recognize God, the Holy, in their midst. But they did not. Instead, the ones who receive and follow Jesus are unexpected: the religiously uneducated, the unchurched, those who have been excluded from temple life, or deemed by the institution to be unacceptable. These "little ones" are the ones to whom God's son and God's salvation has been revealed, and they are the ones to whom Jesus speaks when he says,

"Come to me, all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."

Jesus calls out to the spiritually weary: the outcast, the oppressed, the rejected, the suffering; people hungry for God and God's salvation — and he beckons them to draw near to God, to him, and to find there rest for their weary, heavy-laden souls.

And Jesus' words, they resonate with us, don't they. Because we know what it is to be weary; worn out, exhausted. We can imagine how wonderful it would feel to be freed from that which weighs us down, to be able to let go of all our concerns — to trust in Jesus, and to find in him, life anew.

We live in a contentious world. Countries & people are at war with one another, each side unyielding & certain that its viewpoint is right: Palestine and Israel; Ukraine and Russia; and here at home — Democrats and Republicans; Conservatives and Liberals seem unable to find common ground. One can't help but see the brokenness; division, pain and suffering in the world, and yes my friends, it can feel overwhelming. It may feel like there is nothing we can do about it — so we turn our heads, we do our best to get by, and we hope that

someday things will change — that *God* will change things. That one day, there will be peace on earth.

In place of the Creed today, we will say the Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals and creation. St. Francis was

- A monk whose love for Christ informed all that he said and did.
- A man who chose to live in simple poverty, so to stay balanced and grounded.
- A man who dedicated himself to serving the poor with generosity and compassion.

If you open your bulletin to page XXX you'll find the prayer. Go ahead and let's take a look. Although written anonymously by a French author in 1913, it is attributed to St. Francis. This prayer expresses hope that with *God's* help, we might offer ourselves selflessly, generously, and courageously to the service of others, like Francis, like Jesus. It asks that we become agents of reversal — people who counter the darkness of the world with light — who respond to hatred with love, who speak faith into doubt, who in times of despair and difficulty, offer hope. So, how do we do this? St. Francis said,

"Start by doing what is necessary, then what is possible, and suddenly you are doing the impossible."

When we read the prayer together, I invite you to listen closely. What is *God* saying to you today? How is *God* calling you to be an instrument of peace? Consider: Who is waiting for your light to brighten their darkness? Whose broken heart needs consoling? Whose hand needs holding? Is there someone in your life you need to forgive? Who needs your understanding? Who longs for your love?

This prayer can seem daunting. It asks much of us, and How can we possibly do or be it all? The good news is: we can't. And I don't think *God* expects us to do it all. Rather - Today, we can simply choose "one" that resonates, one that tugs at your heart. You'll know. And Then, as you leave here today, make yourself and *God* a promise that you will seek to be a sower of *God's* goodness — that you will practice being an instrument of *God's* peace:

By extending love, forgiving someone; being of service to others; showing compassion, offering encouragement and understanding. St. Francis said,

The Feast of St. Francis
The Blessing of the Animals
Matthew 11:25-30

The Rev. Laurel Coote

"A single sunbeam is enough to drive away many shadows."

Each of us is called by Jesus to be agents of peace, healing and restoration in the world. We are to shine our light — to be sunbeams of love and hope and joy, to meet people where they are, and to offer what we can to ease their burden. St. Teresa of Avila said:

Christ has no body but yours, No hands, no feet on earth but yours, Yours are the eyes with which He looks Compassion on this world, Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good, Yours are the hands, with which He blesses all the world.

May we, with God's help, be instruments of peace that bless, heal and transform the lives and the world around us.